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Homosexuality in the Ottoman Empire[1]

Stephen O. Murray

Prelude: The Ottoman Empire in Relation to Other Eighteenth-Century European Powers

Othman/Osman, for whom the dynasty was named, acceded to the throne of a small state around Sögüt in northwestern Anatolia around 1281 and ruled until about 1326. The dynasty was overthrown by The Young Turks led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), founder and first president of the Turkish Republic, who abolished the caliphate in 1924. In the *longue durée* with its vast expansion in size and slow contraction, the empire's apogee was during the reign of Suleiman (Sülayman the First, known in the West as "the Magnificent" and within the Ottoman Empire as "the Law-Giver") between 1520 and 1566. During the eighteenth century, well into the long decline after Suleiman's reign, the Ottoman Empire still contained the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean, both north and south.

In the summer of 1683 an Ottoman army was besieging Vienna. For my purposes, Turkey's somewhat extended eighteenth century began with a Polish army relieving the siege in September. (No Ottoman army ever again reached so far into central Europe.) It ended in 1807 with the forced abdication and murder of the would-be reformer, sultan Selim III. It was a

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the "Homosexuality in the Eighteenth Century" conference at the Clark Memorial Library in Los Angeles, March 2000. The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful comments and encouragement of Deborah Amory, Terry Castle, Emma Donoghue, Gary Leupp, Lisa Moore, Candis Snoddy, Kristina Straub, Randy Trumbach, Theo van der Meer, Walter Williams, and especially organizers Lynn Hunt and Tip Ragan.

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century in which the Ottomans had three major ongoing enemies: the Venetian Republic, which was obliterated as a power in the Eastern Mediterranean over the course of the eighteenth century, partly by Ottoman military successes; the Hapsburg Empire, which increased its southeastern extension under the leadership of Prince Eugen of Saxony, only to lose Serbia in the treaty of Belgrade in 1737 and be soon thereafter preoccupied with the War of the Austrian Succession; and the Romanov Empire, which posed the most sustained significant threat to the Ottoman Empire's borders.[2]

Given these conflicts, opposition between Islam and Christianity was less salient for those on the wobbling borders of the Ottoman Empire with its shifting alliances than one might suppose. Firstly, as Lord Kinross wrote, the Ottoman Empire was "in no sense a national[ist], but [rather] a dynastic and multiracial empire, whose varied populations, whether Turkic or otherwise, Moslem or Christian or Jewish, were above all else Ottomans, members of a single body politic which transcended such conceptions as nationhood, religion, and race. Alone in its time, it thus gave recognition to all three monotheistic faiths."[3] It also provided significant opportunities to talented individuals regardless of national or religious background, as will be discussed below. Orthodox Christians in southeastern Europe considered Roman Catholic Austrians, Venetians, and Jesuits more threatening to the practice of their faith than Muslim Turks. In particular, they feared forcible Roman Catholic conversion, as had occurred in fourteenth-century Bulgaria. From the mid-sixteenth century through most of the eighteenth, the Ottomans were in tacit and, beginning in 1740, overt alliance with the Roman Catholic kings of France against the Roman Catholic Hapsburgs and the Eastern Orthodox Romanovs. At various points during the eighteenth century, there was also common interest and cooperation with Protestant Sweden, Prussia, Holland, and England. Napoleon's 1798 invasion of Egypt, though purportedly aimed at subduing Mamlûk rebels who had seized power in Egypt and Syria, provoked Turkey to join England and the Ottomans' long-term enemies, the Hapsburgs and Romanovs, in declaring war against France. By 1802 Egypt and Syria had been restored to Ottoman governors by an anti-French alliance rather than the force of Ottoman arms.

2. Persia, if not a continuous Persian dynasty, was also a significant Ottoman enemy. In particular, reverses there stimulated the overthrow of the Tulip Period sultan/patron Ahmet III. See Robert W. Olson, "The Patrona Halil Rebellion and Ottoman-Persian Wars and Eighteenth Century Ottomans," *Indiana University Turkish Studies* 6 (1987): 75-82.

3. Patrick Balfour, Baron Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (New York, 1979), p. 614.

Introduction

As a comparativist sociologist who has culled records describing same-sex sexual relations from many times and places, I thought it would not be too hard to write something about the eighteenth-century Turkish empire. After all, the view of the Ottomans as addicted to the "filthy pleasures" of pederasty is, if not constant, at least a leitmotif in Western discourse from the time of the Crusades through the sodomization scene in the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

Even those who extolled the classic Ottoman organization as rational and meritocratic (prototypically Albert Lybyer; more grudgingly O. G. de Busbecq, Paul Ricaut, and others)[4] acknowledged that sexual relations occurred among pages training to become state officials and between pages and their masters. With some of the skepticism I have often given claims about the absence of homosexuality in various times and places, I started to turn the "How did they know this?" question on the assertions about widespread pederasty involving Ottoman officials from the sultans down to local pashas,[5] and also on assertions of female-female sexual relations in the seraglios. Further complicating my task was the realization that most of what I had used to write the chapters about Ottoman courts in *Islamic Homosexualities*[6] was from the fifteenth, sixteenth, or nineteenth centuries. The institutions that had most interested me and other comparativists had begun to devolve even during the reign of Suleiman. The meritocratic system had all but disappeared by the beginning of the eighteenth century. By the middle of it, there were even offices for sale.[7] The last *devshirme*, the roundup of promising boys from Christian families for the palace schools, occurred in 1805 (in Greece), though by the 1660s

4. Albert H. Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent* (Cambridge, MA, 1913); Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters* (1554-62; Oxford, 1927); Paul Ricaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1668; facsimile edition, New York, 1971).

5. E.g., one might wonder whether Lord Charlemont correctly understood that "handsome boys attendant on the Captain" on more than one Turkish naval vessel were, as he was assured, "kept *solely* for this infamous purpose." James C. Charlemont, *The Travels in Greece & Turkey*, ed. W.B. Stanford and E.J. Finopoulos (1749; London, 1984), p. 203, emphasis added. Given that nothing was stolen, I doubt that he misunderstood the aim of the hot pursuit of the eighteen-year-old in his entourage.

6. Stephen O. Murray, "Corporealizing Medieval Persian and Turkish Tropes," pp. 132-41; "Homosexuality among Slave Elites in Ottoman Turkey," pp. 174-86; and "Male Homosexuality in Ottoman Albania," pp. 187-96 in *Islamic Homosexualities*, ed. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (New York, 1997).

7. Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Ottomans* (New York, 1993), p. 94.

it had already largely ceased.[8] The *yenicheri*—the appellation garbled by Europeans as janissaries, the "new troops" whose ranks had been filled by the *devshirme*—had become increasingly rapacious inside the empire and increasingly unwilling to go into battle on its peripheries. As with rapid promotion based on personal favoritism, *yenicheri* resistance to "foreign wars" dates back to Suleiman, and is probably what kept Vienna from being added to the Ottoman Empire in 1529.

During the eighteenth century, two-way traffic of observers between Turkey and Western Europe began. Early in the next century (on a stay between 1803 and 1806) the admittedly very reactionary Mehmet "Efendi" was discomfited to learn of Turkey's European reputation for pederasty. His hosts thought that, being Turkish, he would be interested in seeing what Paris had to offer in the way of rentable boys. After being shown around the Palais Royal marketplace at night, he challenged the image of Turkey as being especially notable for pederasty, arguing that with "1500 boys exclusively occupied in sodomy" and, especially shockingly, their availability and prices advertised on printed cards, it was far more blatant in Paris than anywhere in the Ottoman realm.[9]

The most famous eighteenth-century reports from any Western embassy to the Ottoman sultans, the letters from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, do not mention same-sex sexual relations except to deny that they occurred in the women's hamams (bathhouses). This assertion, seemingly based on a single visit—or, at least on her first visit, before she spoke any Turkish—comes from someone who had access both to the women's hamams and to seraglios of the highest rank, as male writers did not.[10]

8. Ricaut wrote that it had been "forgotten." Paul Ricaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 80, 197.

9. Quoted by Bernard B. Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York, 1982), p. 290.

10. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack (Athens, GA, 1993). Earlier, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq asserted that some Turkish men refused to let their wives go to the women's baths because of their reputation as sites for lesbian activity. See his *The Turkish Letters*, p. 146. Many foreigners surmised that women in large harems engaged in lesbian behavior, one of the rare instances I have encountered (for any society) suggesting "situational" female homosexuality based on "deprivation" of heterosexual contact. My favorite claim from this discourse is the report of Ottaviano Boy, a Venetian envoy, that for the "lustie and lascivious wenches" in the sultan's harem "it is not lawfull for any one to bring ought in unto them, with which they may commit deeds of beastly uncleannesse; so that if they have a will to eate Cucumbers, they are sent in unto them sliced to deprive them of the meanes of playing the wantons." Cited in Noel Barber, *The Sultans* (New York, 1973), p. 35. Paul Ricaut, for five years secretary to Charles II's envoy to the court of Mahmet IV, after a lengthy passage on the love of sultans and grandees for male pages,

Ottoman Lyric Poetry

The learned are all enamored of boys,
Not one remains who female love enjoys.
—Nedîm[11]

When the rose [anus] holds carnival,
The tulip's [vagina] smartly shown the door.[12]
—Necatî[13]

[The reign of Ahmed III during the early eighteenth century] was a careless, pleasure-loving age when the great world of Constantinople had no thought but to enjoy life to the uttermost, when morals were naturally far from rigid and many things were done openly which in former times would have been discreetly veiled.[14]

I was beginning to wonder whether, aside from stereotyped European assumptions, there was any solid evidence of homosexuality in the eighteenth-century Turkish empire. I then delved into the recent collection of Ottoman lyric poetry, compiled by the most eminent American scholar on Ottoman literature and two Turkish colleagues, and read their policy for specifying the gender of beloveds in their translations:

wrote: "This passion likewise reigns in the Society of Women; they die with amorous affections one to the other; especially the old Women court the young, present them with rich Garments, Jewels, Money, even to their own impoverishment and ruine, and these darts of Cupid are shot through all the Empire, especially Constantinople, the Seraglio of the Grand Signior [Sultan], and the apartments of the Sultans." Ricaut, *The Present State*, p. 34. Most assertions about Sapphic passions in the seraglios date from before or after the eighteenth century. They do not seem to be based on observation or systematic inquiry, and they focus on the largest harems, those of sultans and important viziers. For a overview of the overheated imaginings in European fiction of what was going on in the seraglios see Alain Grosrichard, *La Structure du sérail: La Fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'Occident classique* (Paris, 1979). On (mostly nineteenth-century) fantasies of "the lustful Turk" see Wheatcroft, *The Ottomans*.

11. Trans. E.J.W. Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, (London, 1905), 4:56.

12. In Persian and Turkish poetry the tulip is a frequent metaphor for the vagina, the rose for the anus (with the nightingale for the lover of either flower of the beloved, but often torn by the thorns on the rose's stem).

13. Trans. John R. Walsh, "Divan Poetry" in *The Penguin Book of Turkish Verse*, ed. Nermin Menemencioglu and Fahir Iz (Middlesex, 1978), p. 72.

14. Gibb, *Ottoman Poetry*, p. 12.

> The fact that the Turkish language does not distinguish gender either in [case] endings or by pronouns allows Turks an honest avoidance of the issue that is not permitted to English translation. We were required to assign gender to the beloveds. And what we have chosen to do, where we cannot leave gender ambiguous, is to represent the beloved as a woman.[15]

Nevertheless, these authors were fully aware that "the beloved is often, if not most often, by convention and in a tradition antedating the Ottomans, a young man." Furthermore, "there existed an often-expressed notion that true and open intellectual, spiritual, and erotic relationships were far more possible with a male partner," and "several poets wrote love poems about specific shop boys and other famous youthful male beauties and there are quite a number of poems (*shehrengîz*) consisting of brief, clever descriptions of the most attractive boys in some city [whereas] there are only a few such poems we know of that describe young women (always young women of the lower classes)."[16]

These translators are certainly not the first to heterosexualize Muslim poetry,[17] but I found its perpetuation particularly disturbing in a book published in 1997, especially since Andrews had written about the intertextuality of male-for-male lust in sixteenth-century Turkish poetry—where he recognized that "the pattern for lyric poetry as a whole is based on a genderless or, more likely, male beloved."[18] Looking at this anthology was a turning point for me, a turning back to my more familiar understanding that the record has been effaced, because—even with my casual familiarity with the poetry of medieval Arabic and Persian, and later Turkish poetry—I recognized that some of the metaphors in these poems

15. Walter Andrews, "Ottoman Lyrics" in *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology*, ed. Walter Andrews, Najaat Black and Mehmet Kalpaklu (Austin, 1997), p. 14. Such an argument would run up against the valuing of the masculinity of beloveds in some of the work of the greatest eighteenth-century Ottoman poet, Nedîm. Moreover, in that the choice is generally between boys and girls, "woman" is a particularly misleading assumption/resolution for Englishing Ottoman poetry.

16. Ibid, pp. 14, 15.

17. The Egyptian Sheikh Rifâ'a, who led a mission to Paris in the 1820s, was struck that "in France homosexuality is regarded with horror and disgust to such a degree that when French scholars translate homosexual love poems from the Arabic they change the masculine to the feminine form." (Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery*, p. 291). The proper Victorian scholar E. J. W. Gibb heterosexualized Ottoman poetry, especially in the fourth and final (1905) volume of his history of Ottoman poetry.

18. Walter Andrews, "The Sexual Intertext of Ottoman Literature: The Story of Me'âl^1, Magistrate of Mihalich," *Edebiyât* 3 (1989): 56.

are not ambiguous in gender, and that the settings for many of the sightings and meetings were those which would have been single-sexed.[19]

It is necessary to examine poetry because individual feelings about loved ones (of any age or sex) were not recorded in fiction or nonfiction prose. For Ottoman as for Arabic literature before the mid-twentieth century, as G.E. von Grunebaum once remarked, "Private experience is neither objectivized in action through novel or drama nor presented indirectly through the personification of virtues and ideas or through the casting of figures of history and legend to represent and express personal attitudes."[20] In particular, there is a lack of confessional prose writing. Andrews rightly cautioned that "if we wish to find out how people actually behaved, we must turn to the histories, archival documents, and the like; however, if we are interested in the psychological reality, how people interpreted their behavior, then the poetry is a more valuable resource."[21] But the histories and archives for the Ottoman Empire (as surely he knows) contain little about everyday conduct.

Poetry was *the* literature of Ottoman society, and the patrons of its greatest eighteenth-century poet, Ahmed Nedîm,[22] were the sultan Ahmed III and his grand vizier, the most able of the eighteenth century, (Dâmâd) Newsherhirli Ibrâhîm Pasha, and the Lord High Admiral Mustafá Pasha. The handsome and hedonist sultan, himself a poet and calligrapher, endowed a library building (the Enderûn-ü Hümâyûn Kütüb-khânesi) inside the Topkapi Palace in 1719, and appointed Ahmed Nedîm as its curator.

As Silay notes, it is significant that Nedîm dedicated to Ibrâhîm Pasha one of his most clearly homoerotic poems, one about being smitten by an

19. Sustaining my recovery from doubts was finding a 1994 book by a Turkish scholar, Kemal Silay, *Nedim and the Poetics of the Ottoman Court*, Indiana University Turkish Studies 13 (Bloomington, 1994). Silay is now a colleague of Andrews at the University of Washington, and whom Andrews acknowledged in *Ottoman Lyric Poetry* for help with the Ottoman texts. I find it unfortunate that Andrews does not cite Silay's book since, among other things, it shows that the gender that is grammatically inexplicit in the texts *can* be resolved.

20. Gustave E. von Grunebaum, "The Aesthetic Foundation of Arabic Literature," *Comparative Literature* 4 (1952): 332.

21. Walter G. Andrews, *Poetry's Voice, Society's Song: Ottoman Lyric Poetry* (Seattle, 1985), p. 91.

22. "Nedîm" means "party companion," and the motto of the poet (who was born in the capital, in a distinguished line of legal scholars and officials) was "Let us laugh, let us play, let us enjoy the delights of the world to the full." Quoted by Bernard Lewis, *Istanbul and the Civilization of the Ottoman Empire* (Norman, 1963), p. 260. The poet perished in the chaos of the Halil Patrona rebellion of 1830 which also ended the life of the grand vizier and the reign of Sultan Ahmet. Both the date of Nedîm's birth and the circumstances of his death are variously reported.

attractive bathhouse attendant.[23] Unlike other classical Muslim poets, Nedîm did not write poetry in a mystical vein for which arguments can be made that the beloved is God rather than a human male.[24] Silay also stresses that the metaphor of "the walking cypress" (*serv-I revân*) that recurs often in Nedîm—and in many of the poems that Andrews et al. heterosexualize—invokes tall males. Silay further explains that knowledge of the single-sex context of hamams and drinking parties disambiguates gender for poems with encounters in what were homosocial settings in Ottoman Turkey. And, following Naim, he draws on the poetry with similar Persian roots in a language in which gender is grammatically marked, Urdu, to reinforce the gender of some recurrent tropes, particularly those of hyacinth and cypress.[25]

Nedîm also wrote poetry in Persian. Silay quotes several such poems that value the beards of beloveds: e.g., "compared to a beard, the eyelashes and waist of the beloved, as thin as a hair, have no value" and "only his beard has captured me."[26] Sprouting a beard has typically been the point at which young males cease to be attractive in Muslim as in other pederastic poetic traditions.[27] The beard is a sex-linked attribute. Similarly, given the total depilation practiced by Turkish women, Nedîm's ardent exclamation in another poem "from hair to hair, I consider every part of your body kissable" can only be directed at an adult male.

As obscure (especially to those unaware of the gendering of cypresses, roses, moths and nightingales in the Turkish schema of metaphors) as Ottoman poetry may seem, and even resisting the temptation to regard all poetry as self-representation in regard to desires, "what we can very easily learn from poetry and other arts is how the society as a whole interpreted what it did and ultimately why it behaved as it did."[28] Whatever the actual

23. Silay, *Nedim and the Poetics*, pp. 101-2.

24. Ibid, pp. 94-95. I have pressed the argument that Allah cannot be the beloved of some classical Persian and Turkish poetry elsewhere. Murray, "Corporealizing." See also Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975) and *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York, 1982); and Walter Andrews, "The Sexual Intertext," pp. 35, 41.

25. C.M. Naim, "The Theme of Homosexual (Pederastic) Love in Pre-Modern Urdu Poetry" in *Studies in Urdu Gazal and Prose Fiction*, ed. Umar Memon (Madison, 1979).

26. Silay, *Nedim and the Poetics*, p. 100.

27. Some poets have, nevertheless, extolled continuing love for those whose smooth cheeks and legs are darkened by hair sprouting. See Stephen O. Murray, "The Will Not to Know" in *Islamic Homosexualities*, p. 23; and Stephen O. Murray, *Homosexualities* (Chicago, 2000), pp. 108, 120, 373-75.

28. Andrews, *Poetry's Voice*, p. 198.

desires of the poet, those expressed in his poetry were comprehensible within the society.

Some Oddly Unsuspected Sites

Given the suspicions that Northern European Protestants, especially English ones, harbored of monasteries as breeding-grounds of sodomy, it is remarkable that the *tekke*, the dervish cloisters where a *sheyh* resides with a number of celibate followers, were not similarly perceived as sites of "situational" homosexuality. This is even more surprising given the palpable homoeroticism of Sufi mysticism, particularly in the ecstatic poetry of the Jalalu'd-Dîn Rûmî, founder of the Mevlevis ("whirling dervishes") centered in the middle of Anatolia in Konya.[29] Moreover, the *batinî* or esoteric view identified with the Ismailis and several extreme Sufi sects held that outward reference of all religious, and hence social tenets, was meaningless and to be ignored in favor of the hidden, inner reference.[30] The keepers of Islamic orthodoxy were suspicious of the licentiousness of mystic sects (especially their music and dancing), but I have not found anything focusing on sex between dervishes. Although there were married dervishes, who lived outside and attended celebrations at the *tekke,* this hardly seems enough to deflect suspicion from those who chose to live in an all-male cloister.

Similarly, the coffeehouses, the first of which opened in Kostantiniyya (Constantinople) in 1555, "became meeting places of pleasure-seekers and idlers, and also of some wits from among the men of letters and literati . . . [Soon] the Imams and muezzins and pious hypocrites complained 'People have become addicts of the coffeehouse; nobody comes to the mosques'" any more.[31] The government made periodic attempts to extirpate the enormously popular institution, the most dramatic being Murad IV's 1622 prohibition and execution of coffee-drinkers (and smokers); but by the eighteenth century the battle against such stimulants

29. Dervishes' "submissive/seductive stance is consistently interpreted [by those within the Sufi tradition] as directed toward the Divine, even though a beloved master/adept may serve temporarily as an intermediary [object of devotion]." Walter Andrews, "The Sexual Intertext," p. 55 n. 39. Although the Greek, Arabic, Persian and Turkish poetic tradition stylizes the suffering of frustrated lovers, the desire is to penetrate the beloved, not to be penetrated, though penetrating the beloved's heedlessness rather than engaging in specific bodily ravishments is the explicit aim.

30. Andrews, *Poetry's Voice*, p. 68. See Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 19-20.

31. Lewis, *Istanbul*, pp. 132-33.

had been abandoned by the sultans. Potshots from clerics did not coalesce into any new campaign to suppress such pleasures, even after the success of the antihedonist Patrona Halîl rebellion ended the Tulip Period (*lâle devri*) in 1730. The homosocial coffeehouses, which particularly prospered during that era, are noticeably absent in European discussion about sexual liaisons between males in Kostantiniyya and elsewhere. However, the gazes and touches of bearded or mustachioed men and smooth-faced youths in various Turkish paintings of coffeehouses suggest that such contacts were made.

Prostituted Entertainers

In contrast to these surprising gaps in looking for places where connections took place, there is a consensus about dancing boys being objects of "the lustful Turks"—mostly as *foreign* objects, since it was unsuitable for a Muslim boy to be femininely displayed and basely used.[32] Though the "obscene gestures" of public dancers "prohibit the glance of a chaste eye," according to Porter,[33] most Europeans who wrote about sojourns in the East felt duty-bound to watch and then bear witness to the "foulness" they had forced themselves to observe. Various Europeans saw not only the "licentious" dances, but some of the passionate rivalry for the boys' favors, including a "war" between soldiers and sailors for dancers in their early teens recorded by Baron de Tott.[34] Most such boys across the empire seem to have been prostituted. I have reviewed a number of nineteenth-century reports that exemplify this pattern, beginning with Byron's, in *Islamic Homosexualities*.[35] As Raphaela Lewis summarized the literature,

> Both boy and girl dancers were called by the same name—*chengi*—and the boys were generally more in demand than the girls. They wore their hair in long ringlets and they dressed like girls and performed suggestive dances . . . The admiring audience would spit on coins and stick them to the dancers' faces, especially their foreheads, as they moved around among them. Some of these

32. James Porter, *Turkey: Its History and Progress* (London, 1854), 1:331-33.

33. Ibid., p. 332.

34. Baron de Tott, *Memoirs* (1785; New York, 1973), 2:130.

35. Stephen O. Murray, "The Will Not to Know: Islamic Accommodations of Male Homosexuality," pp. 24-25 and Murray, "Some Nineteenth-Century Reports of Islamic Homosexualities," pp. 204-5 in *Islamic Homosexualities*, ed. Murray and Roscoe.

> dancing boys became extremely famous and were the cause of many jealous fights, especially among Janissaries in the taverns. When they boys lost their looks and their beards began to grow they abandoned their dancing and became drummers and trainers to the dancing boys . . . A group of these dancing boys was attached to the Serai.[36]

In typological terms some have considered dancing boys to be an occupational type. In my typology of forms of homosexuality,[37] the male *chengi* is an instance of not permanently feminizing pederastic roles, even though while young and attractive the boys were clearly effeminized. In *Homosexualities*, I discuss similar patterns of prostituted young male entertainers from a number of societies.[38]

In discussing Nedîm's paeans to facial and body hair, I have already hinted that there was male love that crossed the conventional age-line of demarcation to include some adult male love objects. *Hat*, the word for "cheek-down," can also mean "writing," and double entendres of this sort are frequent in Ottoman poetry. Puberty inscribed the conventional end of attractiveness, or at least the ideal of that attractiveness. As Andrews noted, "the moment a boy is far enough along in adolescence to grow a beard he is considered a man and is disqualified as a potential beloved." He nevertheless immediately added, "This does not mean that adult homosexual and homoerotic relationships were unheard-of or even that they were universally condemned. However, they were part of the private

36. Raphaela Lewis, *Everyday Life in Ottoman Turkey* (New York, 1971), p. 129.

37. The typology in which same-sex sexual relations are structured by age roles, gendered roles,or are not stratified by differences in age or in gender presentation, derived in my case from Barry D. Adam, "Reply," *Sociologists Gay Caucus Newsletter* 18 (1979): 8; idem, "Age, Structure and Sexuality," *Journal of Homosexuality* 11 (1986): 19-33, is the basis for organizing the material in Murray, *Homosexualities*. Therein, I stress the simultaneity of different organizations in large polities, going back to the ancient world. Murray and Roscoe, eds., *Islamic Homosexualities*, stresses that all three formal organizations (the two status-structuring differences in age and gender, and nonstatus-structured relationships) have existed in Muslim societies (see, especially "The Will Not to Know," pp. 32-41 and Badruddin Khan, "Not-So-Gay Life in Pakistan in the 1980s and 1990s," pp. 275-96). Heretofore, I have resisted Adam's deployment of the great/small tradition contrast, because in the original meaning this contrasted (elite) written religious traditions with folk practices. There now seems to me to be a parallel in that one tradition (age-stratified for Muslim societies, egalitarian in the contemporary USA) is being written about while other forms of relations are less written about.

38. Murray, *Homosexualities*, pp. 168-96.

life of individuals and, like sexual relations with one's spouse, were not appropriate subjects for art or polite public conversation."[39]

Pages, and Yenicheri

The primary idiom of same-sex love for both males and females involved age differences between lover and beloved. To an extent, youth was gendered as unmasculine.[40] Also, at least some of the relationships involved masters and slaves. Homoerotic relationships within the sultan's "slave family" (and pashas with theirs) are the kind discussed in my contributions to *Islamic Homosexualities*, so here I will only briefly consider their state of decay from the more formally rational institutions of the ascendant Ottoman Empire of the early sixteenth century.

By the eighteenth century the *yenicheri* institution had ceased to be staffed by levies from distant provinces and included many who had been born Muslim, especially sons of earlier *yenicheri*. Drake, Miller, and Hidden all stressed that parents groomed sons for sexual service to the rulers and, when successful, sold them.[41] Despite the religious ban on enslaving fellow believers, Muslim Georgians and especially Muslim Kurds provided male slaves, according to Davey.[42] Miller noted in a similar fashion: "The Georgians and Circassians, whose physical types were especially admired by the Turks, found the slave trade with Constantinople so profitable that they maintained slave farms to meet the demand. They not only regularly captured children for the purpose of selling them in the Turkish slave markets, but even reared their own children with this end in view."[43] Further, upon the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia and mass conversion to

39. Andrews, "Ottoman Lyrics," p. 107. The fleetingness of young beauty is a prominent leitmotif of Ottoman and other Muslim poetic traditions (along with the evanescence of earthly fame and glory). Even without an anachronistic sense of "gay," I particularly enjoy Sir William Jones's 1774 translation of a line from Mesihi—two centuries before the Tulip Era—as "Be gay, too soon the flowers of Spring will fade." Quoted in Lewis, *Istanbul*, p. 163.

40. Alternatively, one could say that women were treated as unadult; both boys and females of all ages were subordinate to adult males.

41. Norman Itzkowitz, "Eighteenth-century Ottoman Realities," *Studio Islamica* 16 (1962); Jonathan Drake [Parker Rossman], " 'Le Vice' in Turkey," *International Journal of Greek Love* 1 (1966): 13-27; reprinted in *Asian Homosexuality*, ed. Wayne Dynes and S. Donaldson (New York, 1992), pp. 27-41; Barnette Miller, *The Palace School of Muhammad the Conqueror* (Cambridge, MA, 1941), pp. 78-79; Alexander Hidden, *The Ottoman Dynasty* (New York, 1916).

42. Richard Davey, *The Sultan and His Subjects* (London, 1897), p. 247 n.

43. Miller, *The Palace School*, p. 78.

Islam in 1463, Bosnians "requested that their children should nevertheless be eligible for the devshirme."[44]

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, there was a steady supply—a surfeit even—of volunteers, called *yamak*, eager for the privileges, especially exemption from taxation, enjoyed by *yenicheri*.[45] Many of the state's highest officials continued to be promoted from the ranks of the *ajemi-oghlan* ("foreign-born youth"), mostly Christian-born boys from the Balkans or those captured by North African pirates and sent to the sultan as tribute. The supply of youths captured in battle and through the conquest of non-Muslim territories had ceased by the late seventeenth century. Nevertheless, the antifeudal ideal remained that officials should lack family connections in the center of the empire. Those sent to the sultans of any era "must be of admirable features, and pleasing looks, well shaped in their bodies, and without any defects." Their "chief recommendation in the first instance is their comeliness."[46]

Eunuchs guarded the boys of the palace school, just as eunuchs guarded the female seraglio. White eunuchs (without testicles) supervised the pages. Black ones (who were entirely castrated) guarded the female seraglio. A mid-sixteenth-century visitor, Bernadetto Ramberti, wrote that

> there are about five hundred youths aged from eight to twenty years, who reside in the palace and are the delight of the Signor . . . They never leave the aforesaid palace until they have reached the age when the Signor thinks them fit for offices . . . Each ten of them is guarded by a eunuch called *Kapu-oghlan* [gate-youth], and each has a slave's frock, in which he sleeps rolled up in such a manner that he does not touch another who may be near him.[47]

Although the ranks of nominal *yenicheri* increased considerably, the size of the palace school remained the same. Ricaut estimated that there were more than 100,000 men with *yenicheri* privileges (of which at most a fifth

44. V.L. Ménage, "Some Notes on the Devshirme," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London* 29 (1966): 71. Most of the Bosnian slave boys (called *Potur oghullari,* defined as "boys who are circumcised but not Turkish-speaking") appear to have gone into Palace service rather than the military.

45. Thomas Thornton, *The Present State of Turkey* (London, 1807-09), 2: 230.

46. Ricaut, *Ottoman Empire*, p. 25; Thornton, *Turkey*, 2: 180.

47. Bernadetto Ramberti, *Libri Tre delle Cose de Turchi* (1543), book 2; trans. in Albert H. Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 244-45.

were effective soldiers).[48] There were 112,000 in 1805 and 135,000 by 1826.[49]

It seems obvious that criteria such as bodily perfection might have an attraction sexual as well as aesthetic or functional, not least in a culture in which youthful male pulchritude was much admired and elaborately detailed. Be that as it may, in addition to their selection for physical attractiveness, and their prolonged isolation in the single-sex environment of the palace school—which paralleled the seraglio in many ways, including supervision by eunuchs—pages were discouraged from having heterosexual entanglements for reasons of state. Maintaining a force prepared to do battle far from the home of the capital was one. Preventing the accumulation of wealth and power by families was another.

In the time of Suleiman marriage was forbidden to the *yenicheri*. Still, in the late seventeenth century, according to Ricaut,

> the greatest part of the Janizaries consists of Bachelours, or single men; for though Marriage cannot be denied to any of them, yet it is that which terminates their Preferments, and renders their Seniority uncapable of claiming a right to Offices, or Military Advancement, for being incumbred with a Wife, and other dependencies, they are judged in a condition not capable to attend the Discipline of War, or Service of the Grand Signior.[50]

A few years earlier Francis Osborne, one of the northern savants who recognized distinct advantages in deploying over vast spaces an army of unmarried men, noted that for the *yenicheri,* "quite unshackled from the magnetical force of an affection to wife and children, by use made natural (which chains Christians like fond Apes to their own doors), every place is fancied their proper sphere. . . . Neither doth the want of Wives raise such cries as are made by the Relicts and Children of slain souldiers."[51] "Being for the greater part married and settled" was, by the end of the eighteenth century, an explanation for the degeneracy of *yenicheri* strength.[52] There

48. Ricaut, *Ottoman Empire*, p. 191.

49. Wheatcroft, *The Ottomans*, p. 90.

50. Ricaut, *Ottoman Empire*, p. 195.

51. Francis Osborne, *Political Reflections upon the Government of the Turks* [etc.] (London, 1656), p. 253. I interpret "made natural" to indicate that Osborne did not believe domesticity natural for men, but it might become habitual. He did not get into the question of what is "natural" sexual conduct for those not "chained to their own doors."

52. Thornton, *Turkey*, p. 236.

were wives and children to support, and whatever wealth a soldier or official had accumulated was likely to be seized by the state rather than posthumously passed to widows and children.[53] During the eighteenth century, soldiers "thought more of their living than of the sword," as Slay paraphrases a 1728 Venetian despatch.[54]

Across the centuries of the Ottoman empire, "frequent fierce wars carried off many of the sultan's slaves, and the danger of execution and of confiscation of property put a check on their establishment of families."[55] As the imperial treasury became impoverished, especially by the extravagances of the Tulip Period during the second decade of the eighteenth century, riches accumulated by the sultan's slaves, *yenicheri* and other kinds, reverted to the treasury of the sultan. Without much likelihood of security for such families as Ottoman functionaries started, boy favorites were widely indulged.

Decadence

Eighteenth-century Ottoman functionaries were more uxorious than the world-conquerors of the fifteenth century and the "voluptuousness" of the last centuries of the empire was more heterosexual than it had been for the more bellicose earlier generations. Thus, any correlation between a focus on homoerotic relations and military/political decadence is negative, as it was for ancient Rome, with more pederasty among the generations of conquerors than among those of the crumbling empires.

I have to conclude by stressing that the materials I have considered focus almost exclusively on the elite, the courts of the sultans and their leading viziers. Most of the males and all of the females in the sultans' palaces were slaves and first-generation Muslims. Although the patriline of the sultans descended from Othman, the matriline was almost entirely non-Turkish slaves. A sultan's mother, his concubines, and son's wives were all alien slaves. Similarly, in the earlier centuries all of the major officials—and still during the eighteenth century many of the major officials—were a one-generation elite, recruited from the peripheries of the empire and beyond. They were not Turkish or Muslim by ancestry. And they were not permitted to pass power or riches to their descendants. Without inheritance and with little likelihood of living to a peaceful old age, the usual motivations for

53. Porter, *Turkey*, p. 395.

54. Mary L. Shay, *The Ottoman Empire from 1720 to 1734 as Revealed in Despatches of the Venetian* Baili (Urbana, 1944), p. 24.

55. Lybyer, *Government*, p. 70.

building families were lacking—for the *yenicheri,* in particular, but also for nominally civilian officials. When the meritocratic system most closely approximated the ideal norms of the system, the Ottoman empire was triumphant. As family aggrandizement corrupted the meritocratic ideal, the empire declined in power. In the eighteenth century, rather than threatening to extend further into Europe, the empire was propped up by northwestern European powers, especially France and eventually England as well—states more concerned about Romanov and Hapsburg expansion than about whether territories were governed by Muslims or Christians—or by pederastic potentates.